

TAXON SUMMARY

Freckled Duck

1	Family	Anatidae
2	Scientific Name	<i>Stictonetta naevosa</i> (Gould, 1841)
3	Common Name	Freckled Duck
4	Conservation status	Least Concern

5 Reasons for listing

Although scarce, the species is subject to wide natural fluctuations, rather than a distinct decline. However, status should be reassessed should further water be extracted from inland rivers. This could result in a significant decline in habitat quality (c), and a population decrease of 20% over the next three generations (15 years: Vulnerable: A2).

	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	5,000,000 km ²	high
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	1,500,000 km ²	low
trend	fluctuating	high
No. of breeding birds	20,000	low
trend	fluctuating	high
No. of sub-populations	2	medium
Largest sub-population	19,000	low
Generation time	5 years	low

6 Intraspecific taxa

None described.

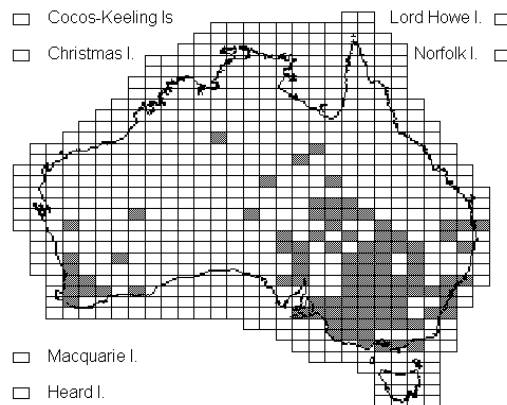
7 Past range and abundance

Recorded across southern and central Australia with largest concentrations recorded in Paroo-Warrego catchment (Currawinya Lakes, Qld), Eyre-Georgina-Mulligan catchment (Lake Torquinie, Qld) and possibly at Lake Galilee, Qld. Other inland sites where substantial numbers recorded include Cooper Creek and Bulloo R. catchments, Barkly Tablelands, Qld, and Lake Gregory, W. A. Outside this area, breeding also recorded throughout Murray-Darling catchment, notably along Lachlan R., and within Millicent Basin of South Australia and Victoria. During extensive inland droughts, apparently seeking refuge in Murray R. Basin, south-eastern Queensland, eastern New South Wales and southern South Australia, but usually some inland refuges remain (Jaensch and Vervest, 1990, Marchant and Higgins, 1990, Jaensch and Bellchambers, 1997). Separate, small sub-population breeds in south-west Western Australia (Jaensch and Vervest, 1988).

8 Present range and abundance

Distribution as above, with occupancy determined by river flows and extent of monsoonal rainfall on river catchments (Marchant and Higgins, 1990, R. Jaensch).

Abundance correlated with Southern Oscillation Index (Kingsford *et al.*, 1999a), with maximum estimate at 19,000 after national ground survey for the eastern sub-population (Martindale, 1986).



9 Ecology

In inland eastern Australia, the largest numbers of Freckled Ducks occur in brackish to hyposaline wetlands that are densely vegetated with *Lignum Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii*, within which the birds build their nests (Braithwaite, 1976, R. Jaensch). In south-western Australia, they breed primarily in seasonally flooded paperbark *Melaleuca* swamps (Jaensch and Vervest, 1988), as well as in lignum and casuarina-dominated swamps of the wheatbelt (R. Jaensch). They may breed prolifically after exceptionally wet years, then disperse widely, largely towards the coast, but, in most years, they appear to be nomadic between ephemeral inland wetlands (R. Jaensch). In the driest years, they congregate on permanent wetlands.

10 Threats

In the past, much of the wetland habitat in the south-east and south-west was drained. The biggest potential threat is the currently-shelved proposal to use water from the Paroo R. and Cooper Ck for irrigation, which would affect flooding of critical inland swamps (Kingsford, 1999, 2000, Kingsford *et al.*, 1998, 1999b). Also, during times of inland drought, when Freckled Duck are found near the coast, they are at risk of being misidentified as game species and shot during duck-hunting seasons (Martindale, 1986, Loyn, 1991), though no correlation between Freckled Duck abundance and hunting effort has been identified (Kingsford *et al.*, 1999a), and several effective measures

have been taken to improve hunter's identification skills and reduce accidental kill (Loyn, 1991).

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Determine water flows necessary to maintain health of breeding habitat, based on comparative analysis of exploited and unexploited rivers.
- 11.2 Develop techniques to monitor long-term trends in abundance, particularly at sites where large numbers recorded.
- 11.3 Maintain adequate water flows in Cooper Creek, Bulloo River and Paroo River.
- 11.4 Protect and manage principal wetlands.
- 11.5 Monitor population on refuge wetlands during times of widespread inland drought.

12 Bibliography

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